

Hush

How should espionage be carried out by a democracy?

This is the basic question posed by the current debate over the CIA.

There is another issue almost equal in importance to it.

If the United States engages in clandestine political operations, who should carry them out? The CIA has been the agent in the past.

Up to now the tendency has been to seek the best of both worlds, secret and open. In the long tenure of Allen Dulles as head of the CIA he was very conscious of his obligation to the spirit of democracy. He did not bottle his whole organization up and keep it veiled in mystery. He made public speeches himself based on the information collected by his agents and the valuation he and his top officials placed on that information. Government officials were permitted to do the same. Newspapermen were often discreetly allowed to hear what was then usually referred to

as "the trend of thinking in the intelligence community."

This was a thoroughly praiseworthy effort on Mr. Dulles' part. It may have been carried too far when President Eisenhower took personal responsibility for the U-2 incident, but it was an honorable attempt to avoid the implications of secret government.

The delicate balance between secrecy and information has more recently been upset by the Cuban affair, from the Bay of Pigs episode to the dispute over reconnaissance and the detection of Soviet missiles. Partisan politics entered the picture. Representative George Mahon scolded everyone concerned for betraying secrets to the enemy. The pendulum swung too far and the CIA was becoming a political football.

We earnestly hope that excesses on both sides of the pendulum can be avoided. Even secret operations ought, in the long run, to be subject to overall review in their effect on public policy.